A BRIEF GUIDE TO FIRST-YEAR ADVISING

Introduction: The Roles of the First-Year Advisor

The faculty of Williams College has committed itself to a primary role in advising its students. For this reason, the administrative structure of advising services at Williams is comparatively small. The Career Center helps extensively with the transition to post-baccalaureate life; the Dean’s Office, the Psychological Counseling Service, and the Chaplain’s Office help with more serious personal problems. Links to these, and other resources can be found at the end of this handbook. In the area of academic advising and planning, however, the faculty plays the leading role.

Williams has two formal academic advising structures. One is “major advising” performed by individual departments, a process that begins once students have identified their major field of study in the second semester of their sophomore year. The other is the First-Year Academic Advising Program, which actually extends into the second semester of a student’s sophomore year. This handbook will help orient you in your job as a first-year advisor. The handbook is divided into two parts; the first consists of a roughly chronological description of pre-major advising, taking you from your initial match with advisees, through the declaration of major process that ends your role as a pre-major advisor. The second half of this handbook is a series of more detailed descriptions of resources, classes, and policies pertinent to the advising process. At the end there is a summary document with contact information and an overview of academic requirements.

The advisor's primary role is to offer academic advice, and student surveys suggest that students are most interested in receiving help with academic issues like choosing a major, choosing courses for the next term, or deciding where and when to study abroad. However, students also express a strong desire for help with longer term goals like considering career options and applying to graduate school, and you may wish to think broadly about your role as a mentor in order to respond to and guide student interests.

One of the most important roles advisors can play is helping students learn to navigate the resources at the college. You’ll likely find that your advisees have some questions that you can’t answer, and they may well be hesitant to approach other faculty or staff for assistance. Guiding them in thinking through who to ask, and making a first phone call or introduction, will likely be among your most important steps. The team of advisors your students develop in this way may include a wide range of people at the college, from faculty with expertise in curricular areas beyond your own, to staff in the library, Academic Resources, the Davis Center, Dean’s office, Health Services, or Financial Aid.

While your primary advising role is academic, your connection with your advisees may well make you a first point of contact if they are struggling with any aspect of their lives. If you find yourself concerned about a student's well being for any reason, remember
there are places to turn. Encourage your advisee to talk with a dean or one of their JAs. Don’t hesitate to call the Dean’s Office, Health Services, Academic Resources, or Security if you are worried about a student. Contact information for these and other resource-people is listed at the end of this guide. After hours, on call deans, psychological professionals, and emergency responders can always be reached by calling Campus Safety and Security at 597-4444.

**Assigning Advisees:**

Faculty are matched, to the greatest extent possible, with first-year advisees who share their interests. Students may change their advisor at any time, and sometimes seek out an advisor in their major department before they officially declare a major. You and your advisees will receive a letter of introduction over the summer with mutual contact information, and your advisees’ names, hometowns, and academic interests. You are encouraged to make contact with your advisees at this time, as they are preregistering for courses. Many advisors find that using email to set a time for a phone conversation is most satisfactory.

**Before your first meeting:**

The college offers several resources to prepare you for your advising role. They include this handbook as well as the “choosing your first year courses” document (http://new-ephs.williams.edu/academics/first-year-courses/), which includes advice from each department and program on course selection for first year students, as well as college distribution requirements. First time advisors are also invited to an orientation session on the day before classes start, at 8:30 am. All advisors attend a morning meeting at 9:30 am that same day, at which you will receive an academic transcript for each of your advisees listing their scores on standardized tests, the results of any Williams placement exams they have taken, and the courses for which they are registered. This meeting includes announcements by the registrar, as well as time to ask questions about any aspect of your advisees’ course selection. If you have additional questions you may contact chairs of departments and programs (for specific curricular questions), the Registrar, or the Dean of the College.

**At your first meeting:**

Your advisees will be expected to schedule initial meetings with you between 10:30 and 12:30 on the day before classes start. The meeting should be as early as you and the student can arrange. Your advisees will need the remainder of the day to research questions and sort out their class schedules so that they can be ready to start classes the next day. Please plan to be available throughout the day for students who may need to return for additional advice. The purpose of these initial meetings is to establish contact between advisors and advisees, inform students of where their advisors' offices are, and discuss fall courses and the advising relationship.
Many students will arrive at the first meeting with their advisor seeking advice on graduate school and professional development, or hoping to be told which classes they should take. This can be an opportunity to help students plan a fruitful trajectory that will allow them to meet their goals, but it can also be an excellent opening to discuss the values of a broad liberal arts education and a chance to push students to take classes outside their comfort zone. You may also refer to the "choosing first year courses" document [http://new-ephs.williams.edu/academics/first-year-courses/](http://new-ephs.williams.edu/academics/first-year-courses/) for more information on course requirements.

While you discuss courses with your advisees, you may wish to keep several issues in mind that are particularly important for first year students:

- All first year students are required to take a Quantitative Skills Assessment during First Days. Using test scores and other available data, quantitative skills advisors will identify and interview students who may need extra help in mathematics or in preparing for science courses. Results of this interview will appear on the academic transcript you will receive during Advisor Orientation; if your advisee has been asked to take mathematics 101 or 102, it is strongly recommended that they do so in their first year. If they have received a “provisional pass” they are not required to take any additional courses, but they may need help in choosing and completing the quantitative skills requirement. For more information, or if your advisee has failed the Assessment and not yet had an interview with a skills advisor, contact Stuart Johnson at sjohnson@williams.edu or at x2166.

- All students are required to fulfill the college writing requirement by taking two writing intensive courses (marked with a picture of a pencil in the course catalogue). One of these courses must be completed by the end of the sophomore year, and the second by the end of the junior year. It is highly recommended that students take one such course in their first year.

- Optional placement tests: The college offers placement tests in the sciences, languages, and music, which are required to place out of introductory level courses. More information on these tests can be found in the "First Days" calendar.

- Some departments offer courses specially geared toward first year students, which can be particularly rewarding as an entry into a discipline, or as a way to bolster mathematical or writing skills.

The college offers three courses that serve as skills refreshers - Mathematics 101 and 102, and English 150. If an advisee scored below the cut-off point on the quantitative skills assessment test they will have already been informed that they need to take Math 101 or 102 before their first meeting with you. English 150 is open enrollment, but is more directly focused on expository writing skills than other introductory English classes. Because self-assessment is the primary route to English 150, advisors might wish to suggest this course to students who they believe would benefit from work on basic writing skills.
• It is a great idea to ask students about their **long term goals**. Even if they don’t have any idea what they aspire to do after college, you’ll learn something about how your advisee views him or herself, and also to make it clear that you are happy to talk about long-term planning as well as immediate concerns. If your advisee is interested in engineering or medicine, dentistry, or veterinary medicine you may wish to refer them to dedicated advisors in those fields, as graduate programs often require specific pre-requisites. Please also see the more detailed sections at the end of this document on preparation for engineering and the health professions. Dedicated advisors are:

  Engineering: Professor Jeff Strait jstrait@williams.edu (x2008)
  [http://physics.williams.edu/pre-engineering/](http://physics.williams.edu/pre-engineering/)

  Health Professions: Ms. Jane Cary jane.d.cary@williams.edu (x2598)
  [http://careers.williams.edu/students/advanced-study/pre-health-2/](http://careers.williams.edu/students/advanced-study/pre-health-2/)

• In thinking about your advisee’s schedules, determine whether they participate in athletics or demanding extra-curricular activities and find out which semester presents the largest extra-curricular burden.

**Subsequent Meetings:**

After your initial meeting with your advisees, you will need to schedule at least three further meetings. At these meetings you can check in on your advisees’ well-being as well as their academic progress. You might ask them if they are comfortable with their time management, their extra-curricular activities, or their writing skills. If you have any concerns about your advisees, don't hesitate to contact the Dean's Office at x4261.

• **First Year Warnings:** First year warnings are issued in late-October for fall semester and early April for spring semester. If any of your advisees have received a first year warning, you will be notified by the Dean’s Office in October and should meet with the advisee to discuss their academic progress.

• **Spring Pre-Registration:** You will meet with your advisees in late-October/early-November for spring pre-registration. This is a time to discuss courses for the upcoming spring semester, as well as to review progress in fall courses and continue longer range academic planning. You should schedule meetings with all of your advisees shortly before or during registration period.

• **Fall Pre-Registration:** You will meet with your advisees again in late April/early May for fall preregistration. Again, this is a time to discuss courses for the upcoming semester, as well as to review progress in spring courses and continue longer range academic planning.

• **Spring preregistration, Sophomore Year:** You will meet with your advisees again in late October/early November of their sophomore year. (You may, at this point, have
additional advisees assigned whose initial first-year advisor is on leave. If you are on leave, your advisees will be assigned to a new advisor.) This is the last required ‘pre-major’ advising meeting, and is a time to discuss prospective majors and review progress on general academic requirements as well as to discuss courses for the upcoming spring semester. Your advisees will declare a major in April of sophomore year, at which time their official advising will move to the department(s) or program(s) in which they are majoring.

• The three preregistration advising meetings listed above are required meetings enforced by an advising hold. Advisors are encouraged to arrange occasional informal meetings to check on advisees’ academic progress, and personal well-being. There is no required advising during subsequent drop-add periods, but drop/add is an excellent time to review completed courses and help advisees settle their schedules.

Changing Academic Advisors:
Students may choose to change advisors for purely academic reasons; for example, many students know what they will major in from their freshman year, and want to be as well integrated into their home department as possible. More problematic, if much rarer, are clashes over students' plans or personality conflicts. If you encounter a problem that you think would be best solved by directing your advisee to another advisor, or if an advisee seems entirely resistant to advice and you are concerned that their plans are deeply flawed, contact the Dean's Office.

Engineering:

Students interested in engineering usually major in one of the sciences or mathematics at Williams, and then obtain a master’s degree or a doctorate from an engineering school. While the prerequisite courses vary from one engineering graduate program to another, all programs require a strong background in mathematics and science. We recommend the following Williams courses to prospective engineers:

CHEM 151, (or 153 or 155) Concepts of Chemistry
CHEM 256 Intro to Physical & Inorganic Chemistry
CSCI 134 Introduction to Computer Science
ECON 110 Principles of Microeconomics
MATH 103, 104, 105 (or 106) Calculus I, II, and Multivariable
PHYS 210 Mathematical Methods for Scientists
or MATH 209 Differential Equations & Vector Calculus
PHYS 141 Particles and Waves
PHYS 142 Foundations of Modern Physics
or PHYS 151 Seminar in Modern Physics
PHYS 201 Electricity and Magnetism
PHYS 202 Waves and Optics
Particular fields of engineering may have additional recommended courses. It is important that prospective engineers begin taking the recommended courses during their first year at Williams.

An alternative route to an engineering career is the 3-2 engineering program. A student can study at Williams for three years and then transfer to an engineering school for two more years of study. At the end of this program, the student earns both a B.A. from Williams and a B.S. in engineering. Students considering the 3-2 program should plan to complete the above-recommended courses in three years. Professor Jefferson Strait (x2008), the pre-engineering advisor, will be happy to answer questions about course selections and about the various paths from a liberal arts education to an engineering career.

**Medicine and Health Professions**

All medical, veterinary and dental schools require at least eight semesters of laboratory sciences, including two semesters of biology, four of chemistry, and two of physics. Many schools also require courses in English, statistics, biochemistry, social sciences and mathematics. Prerequisite programs can vary somewhat from program to program. Pre-med students may complete an undergraduate major in any field of interest.

If you have doubts about the preparation or ability of a pre-med advisee who is intent upon taking a full load of lab sciences in the first semester of their first-year, contact the Dean’s Office or the Health Professions Advisor to discuss the situation. A significant percentage of the first-year students who get in trouble early in their careers at Williams do so because of difficulties they encounter handling multiple lab science courses. At the same time, many students—including a number with relatively modest SATs and no AP science courses—are able to handle the pressures of taking a laboratory-intensive load in their first semester. So the best rule of thumb is to consult with others if you are concerned about a student’s course choices.

The Health Professions Advisor is Jane Cary; you may contact her at x2598 or at jdc1@williams.edu.
Summary of Academic Requirements: Fall 2013

REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
Pass 32 semester courses
Pass 4 Winter Study Projects
Complete a major with at least a C- average in the major
Complete 4 physical education activities by the end of the sophomore year
Complete the Distribution Requirement

WHAT IS THE DISTRIBUTION REQUIREMENT?
Four parts to requirement – DIVISIONAL, EXPLORING DIVERSITY INITIATIVE, WRITING & QUANTITATIVE/FORMAL REASONING

DIVISIONAL DISTRIBUTION REQUIREMENT
The departments are divided into 3 divisions: (1) Languages and the Arts, (2) Social Studies, (3) Science and Mathematics
Must pass 3 graded semester courses from each division; 2 of the courses in each division must be passed by the end of the sophomore year
No more than 2 courses in each division used to satisfy the divisional distribution requirement can have the same subject/prefix, e.g., in Division 1, no more than 2 could be in English

EXPLORING DIVERSITY INITIATIVE DISTRIBUTION REQUIREMENT
Courses that comprise the Exploring Diversity Initiative may fall under a variety of categories, including (but not limited to) the following:
1. Comparative Study of Cultures and Societies. These courses focus on the differences and similarities between cultures and societies, and/or on the ways in which cultures, peoples, and societies have interacted and responded to one another in the past.
2. Empathetic Understanding. These courses explore diverse human feelings, thoughts, and actions by recreating the social, political, cultural, and historical context of a group in order to imagine why within that context, those beliefs, experiences, and actions of the group emerged.
3. Power and Privilege: These courses link issues of diversity to economic and political power relations, investigating how cultural interaction is influenced by various structures, institutions, or practices that enable, maintain, or mitigate inequality among different groups.
4. Critical Theorization: These courses focus on ways scholars theorize the possibilities of cross-cultural understanding and interaction; they investigate the ways that disciplines and paradigms of knowledge both constitute "difference" and are reconfigured by the study of diversity-related questions.
5. Cultural Immersion: In various ways these courses immerse students in another culture and give them the tools with which to understand that culture from the inside. They include those foreign language courses that explicitly engage in the self-conscious awareness of cultural and societal differences, traditions, and customs as an integral aspect of language study.
All students are required to complete ONE course that is part of the Exploring Diversity Initiative. Although this course, which may be counted toward the divisional distribution requirement, may be completed any semester before graduation, students are urged to complete the course by the end of their sophomore year. Courses used to fulfill this requirement may not be taken on a pass/fail basis.
Courses designated as exploring diversity initiative are marked with D in catalog, and with a globe symbol online.

WRITING REQUIREMENT
Must pass 2 graded semester courses which are writing intensive; 1 by the end of the sophomore year and 1 by the end of the junior year
Courses may also be used for Divisional, Exploring Diversity Initiative, Quantitative/Formal Reasoning Requirements and/or major
Courses designated as writing intensive are marked with W in catalog (and with a pencil online.)

QUANTITATIVE/FORMAL REASONING REQUIREMENT
Must pass 1 graded semester course primarily concerned with quantitative or formal reasoning by end of junior year; passing Quantitative Skills Test or MATH 100/101 is a prerequisite
Course may also be used for Divisional, Exploring Diversity Initiative, Writing Requirements and/or major
Courses designated as QFR are marked with Q in catalog (and with a # online.)

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT MAJORS NOW?
You will declare your major during the spring of your sophomore year but you should think about majors when choosing your courses.

The catalog describes requirements for each major.

To be eligible for a major must have at least C- in each course in major taken in first and second years.

**WHAT IS THE COMMITTEE ON ACADEMIC STANDING?**

A ten person faculty committee that hears petitions to waive academic rules; also reviews student records after each term.

**ADVANCED PLACEMENT CREDITS**

AP CREDIT MAY NOT BE USED TOWARD THE 32 SEMESTER OR 4 WSP COURSES REQUIRED FOR GRADUATION OR TOWARD THE DISTRIBUTION REQUIREMENT. With permission from the appropriate department or program, AP credit may be used for placement and/or toward major or concentration requirements.

**WHAT IS THE NORMAL COURSE LOAD FOR A SEMESTER?**

You must take 4 regularly graded courses each semester.

Although not usually recommended for first-term students, you may take an extra course which will not count toward graduation; register for this extra course on a pass/fail basis at the beginning of the semester; at mid-term, you will receive a form which allows you to drop this extra course from your record, stay in it on a pass/fail basis, or change it to a regularly graded course so it will count in your average.

**THESE OPTIONS ARE AVAILABLE ONLY FOR THE EXTRA COURSE**

**WHAT LIMITS ARE THERE ON COURSES THAT FIRST YEAR STUDENTS CAN SIGN UP FOR?**

During the first two years of study, students are limited in the number of courses they may take in one department or subject each semester as follows:

- a) First-year students may take no more than one course with the same course prefix, nor more than two in one department, in a semester.
- b) Sophomores may take no more than two courses with the same course prefix, nor more than three in one department, in a semester.
- c) Sophomores may take no more than three courses with the same course prefix, nor more than four in one department, during the full year.
- d) A student may take no more than a total of five courses with the same course prefix, nor more than eight in one department, during the first two years.
- e) Any exception to the above early concentration rule may be requested by a petition to the Committee on Academic Standing (C.A.S.) filed at the time of registration. Petitions can be found here [http://web.williams.edu/Registrar/petitions/index.html](http://web.williams.edu/Registrar/petitions/index.html).

**WHAT ARE THE REQUIREMENTS TO MAINTAIN GOOD ACADEMIC STANDING?**

First-year students must receive 3 grades of C- or higher and no failures each semester and pass a Winter Study Project.

Sophomores and above must receive 4 C- or higher grades each semester and pass a Winter Study Project.

**HOW DO I CHANGE MY SCHEDULE?**

All course changes must be made using SELFREG, the on-line registration system.

Complete instructions provided at Registrar's Office web page.

**IMPORTANT THINGS TO KNOW AND REMEMBER**

Some courses are "year-long" and are hyphenated in catalog; must pass both semesters to get any credit.

Your grades will be sent only to you; it is up to you to share them with others, including parents, as you see fit.

**WHERE CAN I FIND INFORMATION ABOUT COURSE CHANGES, FINAL EXAMS, ETC.?**

The Registrar’s Office web site includes an up-to-the-minute on-line catalog and handbook, academic calendars for three years, SELFREG documentation, the final exam schedule and much more.

**ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS**

Ask your advisor; come to the Registrar's Office; come to the Dean's Office - Don't hesitate to ask!

More details about the academic requirements of the College can be found here [http://web.williams.edu/Registrar/catalog/academicinfo.html#degree](http://web.williams.edu/Registrar/catalog/academicinfo.html#degree).
Contact information and Resources:

Safety concerns: Campus Safety and Security are available 24/7/365. (Call for all after hours emergencies and to contact on-call members of psychological services, the health center, and the Dean's Office): 597 -4444 or http://security.williams.edu/

General concerns about student well-being, academic issues, withdrawing from courses, or any advice about where to turn for help:
Dean's Office: http://dean.williams.edu/ or call 597 -4171. There is a Dean on Call 24/7/365. After 4:30, reach us via Campus Safety and Security dispatch, at 413 597 - 4444.

Academic support :
Academic Resources: http://academicresources.williams.edu
Tutors for all programs/departments, Math Science Resource center, Study Skills workshops, disability support services (all services are free of charge).

Writing Workshop: http://writing-programs.williams.edu/writing-workshop/
Writing tutors and writing partners (all services are free of charge).

Disability Services: http://academicresources.williams.edu/disabilities/

Academic information:
Choosing first year courses: http://new-ephs.williams.edu/academics/first-year-courses/
Information and contact people for each department and program.

Academic Calendars: http://web.williams.edu/Registrar/calendars/index.html

First days calendar: http://new-ephs.williams.edu/first-days/first-days-2013/

Academic requirements and regulations:
http://web.williams.edu/admin/registrar/catalog/academicinfo.html

Catalog:http://catalog.williams.edu/

Registrar’s office: http://web.williams.edu/admin/registrar/

Academic Opportunities:
Study Away: http://dean.williams.edu/?page_id=59

Fellowships: http://dean.williams.edu/?page_id=54

Office of Special Academic Programs: http://osap.williams.edu/
Other crucial resources for health, support, information, opportunity and planning:
Chaplains’ office: www.williams.edu/chaplain/
Davis Center: http://mcc.williams.edu/
Psychological Counseling Services: http://health.williams.edu/?page_id=10
Health Center: http://health.williams.edu/
Career Center: www.williams.edu/go/careers
Financial Aid Office: http://web.williams.edu/admin/finaid/